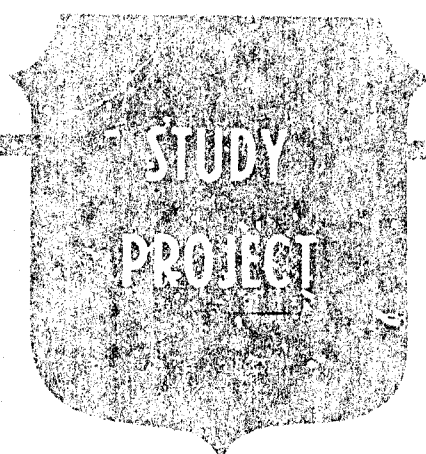


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THE LIBERIAN COOP D'ETAT
ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND
SECURITY ASSISTANCE

BY

COLONEL JOHN H. THOMSON, EN

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THE LIBERIAN COUP D'ETAT
ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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30 March 1988

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ABSTRACT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Assistance to the Third World	1
II. THE EARLY YEARS	5
The Americo-Liberians	5
Into the Twentieth Century	7
Tubman's Changes	10
III. THE TOLBERT YEARS	13
Taking Charge	13
Political Unrest	15
The Rice Riots	17
The End of an Era	22
IV. THE LIBERIAN COUP D'ETAT	30
The Plot	30
The President is Dead	33
The Fall	36
V. THE DOE YEARS	42
Who Is In Charge	42
The New Government	44
The Soviets	46
The United States Counters	47
More Problems	49
More Turmoil	50
Political Revival	51
President Samuel K. Doe	54
VI. THE FUTURE	60
What Now	60
The CIA and the KGB	60
The Bottom Line	62
Conclusion	63
Recommendation	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67



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THE LIBERIAN COUP D'ETAT
ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC AND SECURITY ASSISTANCE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

On 12 April 1980, the oldest African Republic, Liberia, was toppled by a military coup d'etat. Today, Liberia's economy is in shambles and a former master sergeant, Samuel K. Doe, rules as a quasi dictator. In an attempt to shore up the foundering Liberian economy, the United States has been expending approximately \$80 million annually in economic and security assistance.

This paper will examine the United States' role in Liberia. Using Liberia, it will evaluate the use of security and economic assistance as a tool to project United States' interests in the Third World. Liberia was selected because of its historic relationship with the United States, the political changes that occurred following the 12 April 1980 coup d'etat, and the fact that the author served in Liberia ten years prior to the coup and was stationed in Liberia when the coup occurred.

ASSISTANCE TO THE THIRD WORLD

Each year the United States spends billions of dollars in economic and security assistance to our allies. This assistance

is used as a tool to project United States' interests and to counter the threat of communist expansion.¹

By far the most controversial is security assistance. Designed to assist a country in the development of its military, it includes Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Grant Military Assistance (MAP), The Economic Support Fund (ESF), Military Education and Training (IMET), and Peacekeeping Operations (PK).²

Security assistance has been blamed for the United States' involvement in Vietnam and today our country is divided over military aid to the Nicaraguan Contras in their battle against the Sandinistas. Many fear that our involvement in Central America will lead to another Vietnam with similar disastrous results. Cost of security assistance programs vary from less than \$1 million to countries like Liberia to hundreds of millions of dollars to countries like Egypt and Israel.³

In an election year, with major cuts in military spending already programmed, all forms of security assistance are in jeopardy. Opponents of security assistance argue that such programs waste money, stir up trouble with neighbors, and involve the United States in Third World conflicts. Proponents argue that for a few dollars and a handful of military advisors, United States' interests are expanded into the Third World. Both economic and security assistance are an effective tool against communist expansion.

Our track record in providing security assistance to the Third World is not good. We backed Fidel Castro in his attempt

to overthrow the dictator Fulgencio Batista, believing that such action would free Cuba. Castro won, but we lost. Today, Cuba is an exporter of worldwide communist revolution. Then came Vietnam. Expending millions of dollars and the lives of 46,079 United States' servicemen, we backed first Ngo Dinh Diem then, after several military coups, Nguyen Van Thieu as the South Vietnamese battled the North Vietnamese communists of Ho Chi Minh. In the end we lost the war. Today Vietnam is a Soviet satellite. Then there was Libya, Iran, and Ethiopia where vicious anti-American dictatorships rose from the ashes of fallen friends of the West.⁴ Finally, we come to the embarrassment of Ferdinand E. Marcos of the Philippines.

In each case, the United States government seemed unable to control events and ended up losing face in the international arena. In many cases, the soviets were more than willing to step in to fill the void.

Liberia is a classic example of our failure to predict radical changes within a government. To understand those circumstances, our efforts in maintaining our long standing relationship with Liberia, and the frustrations with the new government of Liberia, we must first look at the unique history of the country.

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CHAPTER II
THE EARLY YEARS
THE AMERICO-LIBERIANS

European explorers found the West Coast of Africa a land of mystery, veiled in triple canopy forests and inhabited by black skinned natives. The land showed little promise of wealth. Yet by the Nineteenth Century, both England and France had well established colonies along the bulge of West Africa on what was called the Gold Coast. The gold exported from this area was not yellow, but black, sweating slaves stuffed into the holds of ships and delivered to Europe and the Americas.

By the mid-1800's, millions of blacks had been taken from their homelands and shipped throughout the world. Then attitudes changed and movements to abolish slavery became active both in England and the United States.

In 1816, the Congress of the United States granted a charter to the American Colonization Society to obtain African land to which freed slaves could be repatriated.¹ The first ships landed on the coast of West Africa at Freetown, Sierra Leone, a British colony. They were turned away and traveled south finding sanctuary near the mouth of the Mesurado River, a site that would someday be called Monrovia in honor of then President of the United States James Monroe.²

Many settlers would die of fever and it took several years and a number of ship loads of freed slaves to establish a colony. The colonists, or settlers as they preferred to be called, found a hostile environment. They were educated blacks, many second or third generation American born. Hundreds died or left for more civilized areas of Africa where the Europeans had colonized. They were not prepared to cope with the environment.

At first, there were numerous skirmishes between the settlers and the indigenous population. Finally, a treaty was signed with the local chiefs.³ The colony began to flourish. By 1840, the settlers had become independent of the American Colonization Society and on 26 July 1847 they declared themselves a sovereign nation, naming their new country The Republic of Liberia.⁴

Joseph J. Roberts was elected as the first president. A light-skinned mulatto born in Norfolk, Virginia, he was the first in the line of 19 presidents.⁵ All would trace their heritage to these early settlers who would be called Americo-Liberians.

European neighbors refused to recognize Liberia as a sovereign power. Even as late as 1910, both Great Britain and France formulated plans to partition Liberia between themselves. The plans never materialized. The United States sent a gunboat to Liberia to counter the threat. She then offered to supervise the reorganization of the Liberian government.⁶

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Until the 1900's, the lighter the color of one's skin, the more influential the individual. The rest of West Africa was colonized by Europeans. The perception was that a totally black government would get no respect.

The Americo-Liberians tended to inter-marry with few liaisons with the local tribes. However, in time, wealthy Americo-Liberians took tribal wives, fathering two or more families--only one being pure Americo-Liberian. English names like Roberts, Washington, Jenkins, Tolbert, and Tubman became a sign of prestige. To this day, Liberians have last names that are of English or American origin.⁷

At the turn of the 19th century, the population of the settlers numbered over 20,000. But they remained separated from the tribes that inhabited the country, and as late as 1980, 1,500 people, all tracing their heritage to freed slaves, would control the financial and power base of the country.⁸

This Americo-Liberian culture lagged behind the European colonies. Without United States' intervention in 1910, Liberia would have been annexed by Britain's Sierra Leone and France's Ivory Coast. The United States took over the debt of Liberia, assisted in reorganizing the Liberian government, and sent U.S. military advisors to organize the military and frontier forces. Bolstered by a \$1.7 million loan in 1911, the government of Liberia, under the tutorship of the United States, entered the Twentieth Century.⁹

In World War I, Liberia claimed alliance with the allies. She turned in all Germans living within her territory to the allied forces. The Germans sent a submarine into the harbor of Monrovia and demanded that Liberia surrender all English and French residents living in Monrovia. The Liberian government refused to give up the Europeans. The gunboat opened fire, sinking a Liberian patrol boat and destroying a French wireless station on South Beach. An English steamer responded to the threat and drove the submarine from the harbor. Liberia was now part of the world, a recognized sovereign power.¹⁰

Liberia's first chance for economic growth was to occur less than ten years later. In 1922, the British Colonial government in the Far East had a monopoly on the output of rubber. An American entrepreneur, Harvey S. Firestone, Sr., set out to counter the monopoly. He found Liberia the ideal climate for rubber and negotiated with the government for the leasing of over one million acres.¹¹

By 1926, Firestone and several other companies were operating full scale rubber cultivation. He had introduced modern commerce to Liberia.

Yet the Americo-Liberians remained to themselves, living in communities along the coast. They saw no reason to explore the interior. Even the constitution distinguished between citizens and aborigines who lived in the interior.¹²

In 1927, Harvard University sponsored an expedition into the interior of Liberia. They found a land virtually unexplored. No roads existed beyond the coastal cities.¹³

The relationship between this ruling elite and the tribes was so unusual that in 1930 the League of Nations conducted an inquiry into alleged practices of slavery. They discovered labor agreements akin to slavery. The United States was so embarrassed that it severed diplomatic relations for five years in the early 1930's.¹⁴

In 1941, World War II erupted on two fronts. Cut off from raw rubber of the Pacific by the Japanese, the United States turned to Liberia for the critical resource.

To protect its interests in Liberia, the United States stationed military units in Liberia. The military engineers constructed roads into the interior. They began construction of a deep water port in Monrovia. Lacking such facilities, ocean-going ships were forced to anchor in the harbor while low draft boats ferried supplies to shore. On 26 July 1948, Liberia's one hundred and first anniversary, the Free Port of Monrovia was officially opened.¹⁵ In the years to come, this port would become a flag of convenience for hundreds of ocean-going ships.

The United States military continued to leave its mark on Liberia. In 1951, the Liberian government initiated a treaty agreement with the United States. The agreement established the United States Military Mission to Liberia (LIBMISH). The

first members of the military mission were black United States Army officers. Then as the U.S. Army became integrated, so did LIBMISH. To this day, LIBMISH still works with the Armed Forces of Liberia, their offices located in the Ministry of National Defense Building.¹⁶

TUBMAN'S CHANGES

In 1944, a young black Americo-Liberian, William V. S. Tubman, became the 18th President of Liberia. Tubman was the first president to truly recognize the indigenous population as "citizens" of Liberia. He introduced sweeping reforms to include the right to vote for the "aborigine," improved education, and the opening of the interior.¹⁷ However, he was never able to completely assimilate the tribes into society. Power within the government was still controlled by the Americo-Liberians, and the only political party that existed was the True Whig Party, founded in 1883.¹⁸

A shrewd diplomat, he encouraged enterprise and foreign investment. He was revered by the masses and succeeded in being re-elected to seven terms as the President of Liberia.¹⁹ By 1960, William V. S. Tubman was one of the greatest African statesmen, ranking with Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. Tubman's Liberia was a unique place to visit. The official members of the government still wore top hats and tails to formal functions and, even in 1960, the quiet stable way of life made one think more of 1930 Southern United States than 1960 black Africa.

Yet under this exterior existed unrest and dissatisfaction. In 1969, Fletcher Knebel wrote the "Zinzin Road."²⁰ The novel was about the Peace Corps in West Africa. It told the story of one volunteer's involvement in a plot to overthrow the imaginary country of Kalya. The novel was about Liberia. The "Zinzin Road" was the Zorzor Road in Lofa County, Liberia. The Mola tribe of the novel was the Loma tribe of Liberia. The incident involved Mr. Henry Fahnbulleh, a Liberian politician sentenced to twenty years in prison on a charge of subversion.²² Knebel's novel about a country suffering poverty, ruled by a ruthless minority, and filled with corrupt, incompetent leaders so upset Tubman that he banned the book.

After 26 years in office, everyone was sure that President Tubman would step down in 1971, but he allowed his name to be nominated for another term. William R. Tolbert, the Vice President for the last twenty years, would remain on the ticket as his running mate. Unfortunately, Tubman's health had already begun to deteriorate. In the same year as his election to an unprecedented seventh term, on July 23, 1971 at the age of 75, William V. S. Tubman died. Africa's oldest Republic reached a new watershed in its 150-year old history.²³

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CHAPTER III
THE TOLBERT YEARS

TAKING CHARGE

With the death of William V. S. Tubman, an era in the history of Liberia came to an end. Tubman had prepared for his death and stacked the cards in favor of the aristocratic Americo-Liberians. His successor, William R. Tolbert, at the age of 62, had been groomed for twenty years in his role as Vice President. The son of a former slave who immigrated from the United States in 1879, Tolbert was the ideal candidate to become the 19th President of Liberia.¹

The United States estimated that the transition from Tubman to Tolbert would go smoothly. The status quo would be maintained, yet changes were already beginning. In the United States, a young Liberian student was completing his education. Gabriel B. Matthews was already talking of a new political party, a party that would appeal to the working class and the tribal majority, a party that would bring socialism to Liberia and end the rule of the True Whig Party.²

While Matthews planned the future of his party, Doctor Togba Nah-Tiboteh, a professor of economics at the University of Liberia, became an active member of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA), a socialist-backed organization with a goal of countering capitalist exploitation of black Africa.³

Tolbert was unaware of the changes these men would bring to Liberia. To the surprise of everyone, Tolbert was not just another Tubman. Once he became President, changes began to take place. He eliminated the top hats and tails of the past. At the highest functions, President Tolbert could be found wearing an open shirt and slacks. He initiated legislation to prohibit running for a second term, acknowledging that he would only serve one eight-year term. He established programs to improve the economy. He traveled widely to Europe and the United States. He pushed for the elimination of corruption in government. He could boast that Liberia had no political prisoners. William R. Tolbert was one of the best liked of the African leaders.

His tenure was not without its problems. There had been several student demonstrations, a labor strike, and an alleged assassination attempt.

The Assistant Minister of Defense for Coast Guard Affairs, Prince N. A. Brown, and two army officers, Lieutenant Colonels Moses Kpadeh and William Saydee, were tried for plotting the overthrow of the government and the assassination of the President and his two brothers. Throughout the trial, all three claimed that they were innocent. In the end, they were charged with conspiracy and sentenced to death. Tolbert rescinded the death penalty, sending them to Bella Ella, the maximum security prison. Many people felt that the penalty

was too harsh, and many doubted there had been a coup attempt. Under some pressure, Tolbert set free all three individuals.⁵

By 1979, President William R. Tolbert could describe the year as the "year of miracles." There was an absence of strife and tension; the peaceful nomination and election of a new Vice President had taken place following the death in office of Vice President James E. Green; Tolbert had addressed the South African problem, even inviting President Vorster to visit Liberia; he became the second black African President visited by President Jimmy Carter of the United States; and, next year, President William R. Tolbert would become the chairman of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).⁶

POLITICAL UNREST

In the Summer of 1979, William R. Tolbert would host the Organization of African Unity conference in Monrovia. As he prepared for the conference, the dark storm clouds of political unrest were just over the horizon.

Tolbert was going to retire at the end of his term in 1983. In preparation for retirement, he started construction of a new home in Bentol, a suburb of Monrovia. He made several trips to Europe, placing money in a Swiss bank.

People began to talk about excessive expenditures and some asked where Tolbert was getting all his money.⁷ His son, A. B. Tolbert, added to the gossip, spending wild sums of money and throwing wild parties.

Under rumors of graft and corruption at the highest levels of the Tolbert government, the construction of the OAU conference site became a major issue of contention. By tradition, the new chairman of the OAU would host the heads of state convention in his country. President Tolbert wanted a first class conference area. The site selected was owned by several Americo-Liberian business men. It was located twenty miles west of Monrovia, over sixty miles from the International Airport. The original cost of \$35 million quickly escalated to well over \$100 million.⁸

In a nation where the Gross Domestic Product was \$927 million in 1976 and the FY 79 budget was only \$340 million, the cost of the OAU conference center was devastating.⁹ Tolbert had to rob Peter to pay Paul.

If the financial problems were not bad enough, 1979 emerged as the beginning of political opposition to the True Whig Party. Doctor Togba Nah-Tipoteh was elevated to the position of Chairman of the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA). MOJA is a multi-national African organization predominantly involving West African Nations. It claims no political affiliation and has a goal of establishing a new society in favor of the masses.

As a former Professor of Economics at the University of Liberia, Doctor Tipoteh had battled the Tolbert Administration from 1971 through 1974. He was responsible for several student demonstrations and was an outspoken socialist who openly demanded

change through revolution. By 1974 he had been dismissed from his position at the University and began working full time for MOJA.¹⁰

With Doctor Tipoteh's knowledge of economics, he was quick to point out the excessive expenses for the OAU site and its future impact on the National Debt.¹¹

While MOJA rattled their swords, Gabriel B. Matthews returned to Liberia. In the early 1970's, he had started the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL). Matthews viewed PAL as espousing the principles of African Socialism. He saw a future society based on the traditional values of the people. Gabriel Matthews spoke against the rule of the Americo-Liberians and believed that one day a common man would be president.¹²

In 1979, President Tolbert invited Matthews and five of his colleagues to return to Liberia, even paying their fares. The President envisioned Matthews forming an opposition party. He was confident of a True Whig victory in 1983, but felt that PAL would add credibility to Liberia becoming a two-party system.¹³ He underestimated Matthews' popularity. Within one year of his return, both PAL and MOJA were openly speaking out against the Tolbert Administration.¹⁴

THE RICE RIOTS

Following the annual report of 1978 rice production, PAL and MOJA reached a collision course with the Tolbert government. Chenoweth, the Minister of Agriculture, recommended that the

price paid for "paddy," or rough rice, be increased from 12 cents a pound to 19 cents. President Tolbert had established a goal of rice self-sufficiency and Liberia was currently importing 50,000 tons of rice a year, 25 percent of her consumption. Chenoweth felt that such an increase would stimulate farmers to grow more rice.¹⁵ The suggested price increase would also drive the price of a 100 pound bag of rice from \$22 to \$30. In a country where the average unskilled laborer earned \$50 per month and consumed 100 pounds of rice per month to feed his family, an eight dollar increase was a disaster.¹⁶

Word of the price increase hit the street in January 1979. Both PAL and MOJA jumped on the band wagon, accusing the government of poor management and claiming that the cost of the OAU site forced the Tolbert Administration to raise the price to pay the bill. Fuel was added to the fire when MOJA leaked to the press the fact that Tolbert and other Americo-Liberians had tons of rice in their warehouses. The eight dollar price increase would net them millions of dollars.¹⁷

On 1 April 1979, Gabriel Matthews applied for a permit to demonstrate against the price rise. The government refused the permit and Matthews announced that PAL would march on the Executive Mansion with or without a permit.¹⁸

The Minister of Justice broadcast strong warnings to anyone daring to demonstrate that they would be dealt with severely.¹⁹ The Minister of National Defense approached the

Chief of the United States Military Mission to Liberia (LIBMISH) and asked for advice on effective control of demonstrators.

The United States Military Mission to Liberia had been advising the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) since 1951. During the mid-sixties, LIBMISH had provided over twenty advisors down to the battalion level. By 1979, LIBMISH numbered six officers and under the 1951 Treaty provided advice to the General Staff of the 5,200 man AFL. In addition, they managed a \$250,000 International Military Education and Training (IMET) program and Foreign Military Sales (FMS) of approximately \$2.6 million.²⁰ Recently, LIBMISH had questioned the leadership within the AFL.

Carefully considering the strengths of the AFL units, LIBMISH recommended that the second battalion stationed at Tubman Military Academy be used for crowd control. Currently being trained by a U.S. Army Special Forces Mobile Training Team (MTT), it was the best disciplined battalion in the AFL.

The government of Liberia elected to employ the Executive Mansion Guard Battalion (EMG) in lieu of the Second Battalion. The EMG lacked the formal training, but President Tolbert felt that they would work better with the National Police. Security Forces consisting of the EMG, the Armored Scout Platoon, and the National Police were prepositioned around the Executive Mansion and key government facilities.²¹

The government crossed its fingers and prayed that PAL would cancel its planned demonstration. But, on the morning

of 14 April 1979, PAL supporters began to assemble in several locations in downtown Monrovia. Their plan was to march to the Executive Mansion where Matthews would present a petition to President Tolbert asking him to stop the proposed price increase of rice.²²

Schools were out for spring vacation and, within a short time, 2,000 students, reinforced with PAL supporters, gathered two blocks from the Executive Mansion. The crowd continued to swell, reinforced by more students and local shoppers. According to some estimates, the crowd reached well over 12,000.²³ The outnumbered Security Forces were instructed to intervene only if the mob attempted to enter the Executive Mansion grounds. Additional Army units were alerted. At some point, Security Forces fired tear gas into the crowd. Then soldiers began firing their weapons, most firing into the air, but some firing into the crowd.²⁴

The mob panicked and began to move toward downtown Monrovia. As they surged past Barclay Training Center (BTC), soldiers from BTC joined the crowd. Mass riots broke out. Shops were looted, cars burned, and the violence spread throughout the entire city. Within one hour, the government had lost complete control of the situation.²⁵ Unable to control not only the population but members of the armed forces, some key members of the Tolbert Administration actually began to plan their escape from the country.²⁶

The American Embassy was shocked by the sudden loss of control and the potential collapse of the Tolbert government. LIBMISH found it difficult to work with the limited leadership of the AFL. Confusion continued to reign and a dusk to dawn curfew was ordered.

Then without warning, the sky over the capital was rocked by the roar of Mig fighters followed by the landing of several Russian Air Transports carrying 700 Guinean soldiers. President Tolbert had appealed for help from his neighbor Guinea. President Sekou Toure' responded with military support. Under the combined efforts of the Liberian Security Forces and the Guinean troops, law and order was restored.²⁷

The only previous occasion when Monrovia had witnessed mass demonstrations was in 1961 when 10,000 striking workers from the rubber plantations converged on the Executive Mansion. But President Tubman had invited 1,500 of the demonstrators to meet him at the Executive Pavilion. Imbibed with massive quantities of refreshments, the workers agreed to negotiate and no injuries occurred.²⁸ This demonstration was different. Millions of dollars in damage had been inflicted on the capital, 400 had been injured, and 140 lay dead in the streets.²⁹

To President Tolbert, the riots were a disaster. Only three months remained before the opening of the OAU conference site. To establish law and order, 33 members of PAL, to include Gabriel B. Matthews, were arrested and charged with treason.³⁰ No expense was spared to prepare for the OAU. By

June, a visitor to Monrovia could detect no damage caused by the 14 April riots. To everyone's surprise, the OAU Conference came off without a hitch. President William R. Tolbert emerged as the new Chairman of the OAU and by August 1979 it appeared that he had weathered the disaster of 14 April 1979, but this was only the eye of the storm.

THE END OF AN ERA

Following an appeal from Gabriel Matthews, pressure from MOJA, and Tolbert's personal belief that Matthews was not responsible for the riots, he ordered the release of the arrested PAL members.³¹ President Tolbert then met with LIBMISH and the American Embassy, discussing sweeping changes within the AFL.³² He removed Lieutenant General Johnson, the Chief of Staff, and replaced him with Colonel Franklin Smith, the Aviation Unit Commander. Additional changes included the replacement of the Brigade Commander, several battalion commanders, and a shuffling of the entire General Staff. For the first time in thirty years, LIBMISH saw leadership within the AFL that had the potential to truly train and lead the military.

The changes came too late. The old True Whig Party members considered Tolbert incompetent for releasing the PAL leadership and the general population felt the riots of April were a result of Tolbert's poor administration.³³

Adding to his political problems was the mayoral election in Monrovia. Indications were that Amos Sawyer, a MOJA candidate,

would win hands down over the True Whig Party candidate.³⁴ To make matters worse, PAL had sufficient names to petition for a new political party--the Progressive People's Party (PPP).³⁵

Gabriel B. Matthews announced that he would bring his petition to the Department of Justice on 30 September. Rumors spread that on 30 September 1979, the riots of 14 April would look like a picnic.³⁶

The AFL, under the leadership of General Smith, prepared for the worst. Then Matthews announced that PAL would hold off registration until things cooled down.³⁷ President Tolbert announced that the mayoral elections would be postponed until the following summer. He felt that this action would quiet down the political situation.³⁸

On New Years Day, 1980, a calm had settled over Liberia. LIBMISH reported continued progress in the military. General Smith was liked by officers and soldiers alike. Old colonels, filling positions through connection with the True Whig Party were retired and replaced with younger, more competent officers, the majority with tribal background. New Years Day also brought the first opposition party in over 25 years. In January, PAL finally became the opposition party that would provide a candidate in the 1983 elections.³⁹ But, for William R. Tolbert, the 19th President of the Republic of Liberia, this calm was only a stay of execution.

The membership in the PPP steadily grew. The party appealed to the working class, and a large percentage of the

enlisted members of the military became card carrying members. More surprising was the number of junior field and company grade officers who spoke openly about membership in the PPP.

The American Embassy reported that it appeared that the PPP would be a contender in the 1983 elections. They even predicted the end of the 110 years of True Whig rule. There was even speculation that MOJA would mount a political party by 1983.⁴⁰

Under this climate of political growth, the state of the Liberian economy became the issue of the day. Both rubber and iron ore, Liberia's major exports, faced depressed markets. With reduced revenue, soaring oil prices, and excessive bills from the OAU conference, Liberia found herself in a financial crisis.⁴¹ Both MOJA and the PPP openly criticized the government's policies. The American Embassy expressed concern over the growing unrest.

On 3 March 1980, shortly after midnight, the Chief of LIBMISH received a call from General Smith. Gabriel Matthews had asked him to meet near the Executive Mansion after midnight. A crowd of 200 supporters of the PPP gathered in front of the Executive Mansion.⁴² They were finally dispersed by military personnel.

General Smith did not meet with Matthews and no one could understand what was going on. At the time of the gathering, President Tolbert was visiting the interior and the Executive Mansion was empty. The next day there were rumors of a possible

coup attempt. Four days later, Gabriel B. Matthews called his supporters to an outdoor rally. He told the crowd that Tolbert's tenure had lead to political instability and called for a general strike the next day.⁴³

The AFL went on full alert and, with the advice of LIBMISH, coordinated security around key government installations. President Tolbert directed both military and police to stop any attempt to organize a strike.

On the morning of 8 March, shops in Monrovia were closed. The streets were patrolled by Security Forces and the government prepared for the worst. Only a handful of demonstrators showed up in front of PPP headquarters. Quickly the Security Forces moved in and arrested several members of the PPP. Matthews fled, taking refuge in the Vatican Embassy. The next day, the Embassy handed him back to the authorities. Within a short time, 38 members of the PPP were under arrest.⁴⁴

On 10 March, 1980, President William R. Tolbert addressed the first session of the Legislature. He announced that the government had uncovered a plot by the PPP to overthrow the government of Liberia. Apparently the plan was to kill President Tolbert during his trip up country. The midnight gathering on 3 March 1980 was to announce his death. General Smith had been called to be a part of the new government. Smith survived because he never answered the call.

The assassination attempt failed when Tolbert changed his itinerary at the last minute. Matthews, knowing that it would

only be a matter of time before the plot was uncovered, attempted the strike in an attempt to gain support. With its failure and his arrest, the PPP was banned by a joint resolution of the Senate and House.⁴⁵ Tolbert and the True Whig Party had not only foiled the labor strike, but also eliminated the opposition for the 1983 elections.

The American Embassy reported President Tolbert's action as a positive step toward stability. Newspapers announced that treason trials would take place on 14 April 1980, one year after the rice riots. Rumors indicated that the True Whig Party was pushing Tolbert to impose the death penalty.⁴⁶ During the trials, President Tolbert would be conveniently out of the country. On 12 April he would leave Liberia to attend a meeting of the OAU in Zimbabwe.

The American Embassy predicted that the ring leaders would be found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Yet, historically, such cases resulted in imprisonment and eventual release. The recommendation was to lay back and see how the trials progressed, then pressure President Tolbert for leniency.

The treason trials would never take place. At 0300 hours, 12 April 1980, William R. Tolbert, the nineteenth President of Liberia and the son of a freed slave, lay in a pool of blood on the floor of his bedroom in the Executive Mansion.⁴⁷ One hundred thirty five years of stability had come to an end. The American Embassy faced the crucial decision as to what action to take with the new leaders of Liberia.

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CHAPTER IV
THE LIBERIAN COUP D'ETAT

THE PLOT

11 April 1980. It was mid-afternoon and the hot tropical sun beat down on the beach behind Barclay Training Center (BTC) in downtown Monrovia. The Atlantic Ocean lapped the beach, the breakers crashing on the sand bar 300 meters from shore. Tin shacks littered the perimeter of BTC, resembling a jumbled mess of miniature card castles. Smoke from charcoal fires heating the evening meal mixed with the smell of cooking food and human excrement that flowed in the ditches dug alongside the shacks.¹

These were the living quarters for hundreds of enlisted soldiers and their families. Earning from \$78 to \$132 a month, these soldiers supported nuclear families of as many as 20 individuals. They lived in absolute squalor.²

Six blocks away, the Executive Mansion, home of the President of Liberia, constructed in the 1960's for millions of dollars, loomed above the horizon. It dominated the lowly shacks of the soldiers that guarded its gates.

A small grove of palm trees grew along the beach. Blowing garbage clung to the base of the trees. The area was scattered with old beer bottles. Several men sat on a log in the shade

of one of the palm trees. A case of beer was open at their feet and they wore the faded fatigues of the AFL.

They were all non-commissioned officers. They had met earlier that year at Tubman Military Academy where they participated in training conducted by a United States Special Forces Mobile Training Team (MTT). The MTT had spent six months training the 2nd Infantry Battalion and these men had been assigned to the Battalion for the training.³

Typical of the younger non-commissioned officers of the AFL, they were in their mid-twenties. They had enlisted in the army as teenagers to escape from the dull life of the village. They traveled to Monrovia to find fame and fortune. Instead, they found themselves trapped in a system where progression beyond enlisted ranks was reserved for the chosen few who had the right connections with the old Americo-Liberian rulers. They possessed only a rudimentary education, the majority without even a Liberian high school diploma.⁴

Today they were united not only by the bond of military kinship but the fact that they had become card carrying members of the Progressive People's Party (PPP). Predominantly members of the Krahn Tribe, they were the grass roots population that Gabriel B. Matthews dreamed about when he formed the PPP.

This afternoon they talked about dreams that could not come true. They believed that President Tolbert had already ordered the executions of Matthews and the leaders of the PPP, now rotting in the Post Stockade less than 200 meters from

where they now stood. Any chance to topple the Americo-Liberians was lost. The history of Liberia was full of plots that failed because the government always found out. There was no chance for salvation.

Then someone suggested the impossible. Why couldn't this handful of men do something about the situation. Three were members of the Executive Mansion Guard and had duty that night. President Tolbert would be arriving late that night from the Baptist Convention. The next morning he would depart Liberia to attend a meeting in Zimbabwe. While he was gone, the members of the PPP would be tried.⁵

There would be limited security at the Mansion that night and these NCO's felt that they could convince President Tolbert to be lenient with the members of the PPP. No one talked about assassination or treason but all knew what would happen. It was agreed that they would act that night and tell no one of the plan. At 0100 hours they would meet in the basement of the Executive Mansion. The countdown had begun.

Friday afternoon the Ministry of National Defense closed at the normal hour of 1630. The General Staff had met that afternoon and discussed the upcoming treason trials that would begin on Monday. Everyone felt confident that the AFL and National Police had the situation under control. The trials would last several weeks and no action was anticipated until after President Tolbert returned from his trip. It would be a

quiet weekend. LIBMISH, whose offices were in the MOD Building, left with their counterparts for the weekend with their families.

THE PRESIDENT IS DEAD

At 0100 hours, the conspirators met in the basement of the Executive Mansion. Even in this short time, the word had spread and by now they numbered at least a dozen. As the night progressed, the numbers would increase.

President Tolbert was late in arriving at the Executive Mansion. After midnight his sedan pulled up at the front door. The President entered and took the elevator to the eighth floor penthouse.

The conspirators made their move up the central stairway. On the first floor, they were met by the Commander of the Executive Mansion Guard, General Railey. Apparently he had accompanied the President to the Baptist Convention. When he realized something was wrong, he grabbed the barrel of one of the NCO's weapons. The weapon, on full automatic, discharged directly into General Railey's midsection. He fell to the floor, his lifeblood pouring onto the thick carpet of the first floor waiting area. He was the first man to die in a coup d'etat that was to topple 135 years of Liberian stability.⁶

The shots caused a nervous reaction and other soldiers began to fire their weapons indiscriminantly. Several members of the group stormed the stairway. They encountered no opposition until the sixth floor.

Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa of the Gio Tribe encountered two members of President Tolbert's Special Security Service (SSS). Like the United States Secret Service, they are assigned to protect the President. One SSS man fired his revolver directly at Quiwonkpa. He missed all six shots and as Quiwonkpa mounted the stairs he shouted, "My medicine is more powerful than your's." The other SSS man dropped his gun and ran. This incident, as Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa led the charge to the Penthouse, would earn him the title, "The Strong Man of Liberia."⁷

Reaching the eighth floor, the soldiers found the door locked. Breaking the door down, they entered the President's living room where two SSS agents opened fire. In the fire-fight that followed, the two SSS agents, two soldiers, and President Tolbert's young nephew were killed.

When the smoke cleared, the President was nowhere in sight. Entering his bedroom, the conspirators found him hiding in his bathroom wearing only his pajama bottoms. The President was dragged into the bedroom where he pleaded for his life. He promised the conspirators \$1 million each and free passage out of Liberia if only they would release him.

As William R. Tolbert knelt on the floor, Corporal Harrison Penue shot him once with a 45 pistol, President Tolbert fell to the floor, severely wounded. When later asked why he had shot the President, he said, "To see the bullet pass through him." Many Liberians believed that President Tolbert practiced

"Black Magic" and that he was so powerful that bullets could not kill him.

Some people even said that the Ivory Staff that Tolbert always carried was actually made from the femur of a human leg and the source of his power. One soldier who was in the bedroom stated that had President Tolbert been holding his staff when they found him, he would have laid down his weapon and surrendered.

The die had been cast. The conspirators had just shot their President and there was no turning back. Corporal Nelson Toe shot Tolbert again, three times in the head.⁸ The nineteenth President of Liberia lay dead on the floor of his own bedroom.

For the next few minutes pandemonium broke out in the Executive Mansion. Indiscriminate firing destroyed many of the rare art works in the building. Bullets ruptured fire sprinkler systems and water flowed down the stairways and seeped through the floors. The officers in charge of the Executive Mansion Guard were all killed or locked up. No one appeared in charge.

However, during the initial plot, Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, the senior NCO of the group, had been selected as the leader.⁹

At 0300 hours, the soldiers now numbering well over 100, began moving towards Barclay Training Center and the Post Stockade where the members of the PPP were being held.

THE FALL

As the firing erupted, a foreign national living near the Executive Mansion called an American Embassy staff officer who relayed the information to the Chief of LIBMISH. The Chief and another member of LIBMISH drove to the American Embassy. They observed numerous incidents of looting and encountered a hasty road block manned by drunken soldiers.

The soldiers eagerly informed the Chief that a coup had taken place and the President was dead. They claimed that a major fire fight was taking place at the Post Stockade where the soldiers were trying to gain release of the PPP. Based on this initial information, a report was forwarded to the State Department that a coup attempt had taken place.

The American Embassy believed that the Liberian government would be able to settle the issue. They had no confirmation that President Tolbert was dead and were told that the 1st Battalion was on its way to Monrovia to reinforce the Post Stockade.

By 0500 hours, the Post Stockade had been seized and members of the PPP released. President Tolbert's body, lying in his bedroom, had been mutilated by unknown persons. To be specific, he had been disemboweled. In later reports it would say that this act had been performed while he was still alive.¹⁰

More likely, the act was done by soldiers who believed that the only way a powerful witch doctor can be killed is by disembowelment. This belief was based on the fact that the

witch doctor can fake death. Such mutilations insured that a powerful individual was, in fact, dead.

With the assistance of educated members of the PPP and MOJA, the coup d'etat became organized. The radio and television stations were seized. At fifteen minute intervals, announcements were made from a recorded message. In general, the message stated that,

I am Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe. I have killed President Tolbert and we have taken control of the government. All soldiers report to Barclay Training Center. Do not take orders from your officers. All military officers stay in your homes. If you go out, you will be shot. Members of the Tolbert Administration turn yourselves in to the Post Stockade. People of Liberia stay off of the streets. We have won. In the cause of the people the struggle continues.¹¹

By 1000 hours, 12 April 1980, the American Embassy was receiving reports that no organized resistance had been mounted by the Tolbert Administration.

Contacts with several key members of the Tolbert regime indicated that Americo-Liberians were hiding in their homes. Fire fights were reported in a number of neighborhoods as soldiers began a door-to-door campaign to round up key government officials.

Particular concern was expressed for the families of these officials. In the past, many had been educated in the United States where they married American Blacks. In many cases, both the wife and children held United States passports. The close relationships that existed between the Embassy staff and the Americo-Liberian elite made it extremely difficult to

grant asylum to his family while turning down the government official for the same request.¹²

Within the next twenty-four hours, the collapse of the Tolbert government was evident. The coup d'etat had total popular support and even outlying military posts fell, the enlisted soldiers relieving the officers of command.

LIBMISH was totally perplexed by the lack of leadership and control within the military. Even the crack Commando Unit commanded by Major William Jabor (a national soccer hero, one of the finest young officers in the AFL, trained in the United States at both Fort Bragg and Fort Benning) could not control his men. They turned on him and he was only able to escape by shooting two of his own soldiers. He eluded capture for weeks and many members of the Foreign community hoped he would regain control of the government. But, in the end, Major Jabor was killed as he tried to escape into Sierra Leone.¹³

Typical of the loss of control in the military was this story, told to the author by a young army officer who later became a high-ranking member of Master Sergeant Doe's government.

At 0300 hours, 12 April 1980, I was alerted to form up a company and move that company to Monrovia to reinforce the Post Stockade garrison. Stationed 40 miles from Monrovia, I dispatched five two-and-one-half ton army trucks to Monrovia. We stopped on the outskirts of the city and proceeded on foot along the beach to Barclay Training Center.

To reach BTC, we had to pass behind the Executive Mansion. At 0430 hours, we reached the beach in front of the Mansion. The entire area was dark. All security lights were out and there appeared to be no activity in the area.

I radioed back to my battalion asking permission to recon the Mansion grounds. The battalion commander denied my request and ordered me to continue to BTC.

Traveling the one-half mile to BTC, I found the Center in darkness and totally quiet. I could hear sporadic firing in the city but there appeared to be no activity around BTC. The force, which numbered 75 men, the total number the battalion could muster, moved on to the parade field. It was close to 0530 hours and still quite dark. The sun would not rise for another hour.

In the center of the parade field were a number of dark masses. I sent two soldiers to recon the area. Suddenly they began to shout, telling me to come quickly. One soldier was screaming in the Krahn tongue. I answered in our tribal language, telling him to be quiet. When I reached the dark masses, I shined my flashlight on one of them. It was the remains of a soldier who had been shot hundreds of times. The other masses were also bodies of men brutally murdered. On one shirt, I saw Captain bars and guessed that this was the Stockade Commander.

Suddenly, car lights flooded myself and my soldiers with blinding lights. Someone shouted through a bull horn telling my men to drop their weapons. The individual spoke both in English and in Krahn. I dropped to the ground drawing my 45. I shouted, "Who are you?" The voice answered, "We have killed the Old Man (a term for President Tolbert) and released the PPP."

The voice then asked me to identify myself. When I did, I was told that since I was a tribal brother, I would not be harmed. But, since I was an officer, I would have to lay down my weapons. If I did not, I would be killed. To my soldiers, the voice said, "Join us and we will continue the revolution." At that time, a number of my soldiers dropped their weapons and ran toward the car lights.

I tried to rally my men but none of my soldiers would listen. I was alone lying beside the mutilated bodies. The voice again said, "Drop your weapons or we will kill you." I dropped my 45 and two soldiers from my own unit came forward. They were told to take me to my home, which they did.

I remained in my quarters for almost three weeks. Then I was informed that I would appear before the People's Redemption Council. I was reinstated in the Army at the rank of Major.

This officer's story occurred throughout the AFL. Over 100 key officers in the grade of Major and above were jailed in the Post Stockade at BTC. Others stayed in their homes until they were called by the People's Redemption Council. Those that resisted, like Major Jabor, were killed.

A similar fate awaited the rest of Tolbert's officials. Within three weeks, over 500 political prisoners were being held in BTC.¹⁴

The number killed during this period was very small, no more than two hundred. The popularity of the Coup and the complete disintegration of the leadership of the Tolbert government reduced the casualties. At the same time, it ensured the success of the coup.¹⁵

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CHAPTER V
THE DOE YEARS

WHO IS IN CHARGE

The American Embassy faced the greatest crisis in the history of United States/Liberian relations. It was dealing with a situation completely out of the norm. No one even knew who Samuel K. Doe was let alone who he represented.

Saturday afternoon, 12 April 1980, a national radio broadcast requested that the Russian Ambassador, the American Charge d'affaires, and the Chief of LIBMISH meet with Master Sergeant Doe at the Executive Pavilion. Doe asked for assistance from both countries and requested that LIBMISH help him control unruly soldiers.¹

Although LIBMISH was prohibited from direct involvement, the Embassy, after conferring with the State Department, authorized them to return to the MOD offices. This enabled them to establish a dialogue with the enlisted soldiers now running the country.

Over the next few weeks, LIBMISH would become a key source of information on the new regime. An example occurred on the Sunday following the coup.

LIBMISH was asked by the American Embassy to assist in the evacuation of a Swiss national wounded during the coup. The Swiss Ambassador had been unable to gain permission from

the new government to fly the wounded man to Europe. A LIBMISH officer was sent to the Executive Mansion to directly coordinate the evacuation with Master Sergeant Doe.²

The officer was escorted to the second floor offices of the President. The Executive Mansion had been extremely damaged during the coup and President Tolbert's office was in shambles. He was taken to a smaller side office. As he entered, an individual seated behind the desk stood up, saluted, and said, "Good morning, Major." The individual was Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, the new Head of State of Liberia.

The officer was given a seat and Master Sergeant Doe spoke to him at some length about the coup. During the conversation, he showed the officer a large brief case half full of United States \$100 bills. He explained that hundreds of thousands of dollars had been found in President Tolbert's house.³ He was using the money to pay his soldiers. He claimed that the President was taking the money to his Swiss bank when they killed him. He saw no reason to help the Swiss.

The officer explained the importance of showing the world that the new government had compassion. Master Sergeant Doe listened and finally agreed to allow the evacuation.

During the initial days following the coup, LIBMISH even became involved in the protection of American citizens. Roving soldiers continued to attack Americo-Liberian holdings. They then turned on the wealthy foreigners. Incidents of looting of American homes by drunk soldiers were reported. As

isolated incidents continued to occur, the American Embassy evacuated all non-essential personnel for a three-month period.⁴

THE NEW GOVERNMENT

In the first week following the coup d'etat, Master Sergeant Doe announced the formation of the People's Redemption Council (PRC). The PRC was composed of 17 enlisted soldiers, the majority of the Krahn tribe, all key participants in the Coup. It would act as an interim governing body, ruling the country until the establishment of a new government.

The controlling power of the PRC was in the hands of four individuals: Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, Chairman and Head of State; Sergeant Thomas Weh Syen, Co-Chairman; Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa, Commanding General of the AFL; and Corporal Nathan Podier, Speaker of the Council. The remaining members of the PRC would oversee various aspects of government operations.

Master Sergeant Doe also announced the formation of a new cabinet. A number of Cabinet ministers were assigned from the ranks of MOJA and the PPP. Gabriel B. Matthews became the new Minister of Foreign Affairs and Doctor Togba-Nah Tipoteh became the new Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs.⁵ Even more surprising was the announcement that six former army officers would also join the cabinet. These included Major Samuel Pearson, the Minister of Defense, and Captain Henry Dubar, the Chief of Staff of the AFL.⁶

With this mix in the new government, the potential for stability existed. Unfortunately, the PRC acted more like feudal war lords, each trying to get a piece of the action.⁷ Local businessmen began to complain of open extortion by PRC members. The cabinet appeared incapable of influencing decisions of the PRC.

Then, the PRC announced the beginning of trials of former members of the Tolbert Administration. The American Embassy expressed concern over rumors that the trials were no more than a kangaroo court.

On 22 April 1980, Master Sergeant Doe invited the world press to Barclay Training Center. Everyone assumed that Doe was going to discuss the execution of four renegade soldiers two days earlier. To the shock of the world, thirteen prominent members of the former government were publicly executed in one of the most shocking spectacles in recent memory.⁸ Master Sergeant Doe then announced that this was only the beginning of what he called the purge of the Tolbert Administration.

The PRC underestimated the reaction of the world to the executions. Not only the United States and the Europeans, but also the African governments denounced the PRC. One of the executed officials was the former Foreign Minister Cecil Dennis, a world renowned statesman. The Nigerian government was so appalled by Dennis' execution that they refused to allow Gabriel Matthews, the new Foreign Minister, attendance at the OAU meeting in Lagos, turning back his flight to Nigeria.⁹

By 22 April 1980, the PRC became a topic in the United States Congress. On 28 April, Senator Hayakawa submitted a concurrent resolution condemning the PRC and the atrocities following the coup d'etat.¹⁰ The American Embassy and LIBMISH warned the PRC that Liberia could lose all United States aid. On 29 April, Master Sergeant Doe announced that there would be no more executions.¹¹

THE SOVIETS

While the United States debated withdrawal of economic and security assistance, the Soviet Union began increasing its support. Within six months, the Soviet Embassy's strength increased substantially. The Cubans opened a consulate, the PLO sent representatives to Liberia, and Libya opened the Libyan People's Bureau. The Soviet Block had welcomed the PRC into the fold.¹²

Members of the PRC began taking trips to Soviet Block countries. They became the guests of Libya and Ethiopia. Master Sergeant Doe was invited to visit Moscow.¹³ Members of the PRC proudly carried AK 47 assault rifles. The Presidential jet made a trip to Libya to pick up a special shipment of Soviet weapons. The battle to win Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe and the PRC had begun.

THE UNITED STATES COUNTERS

The United States government countered the Soviet offers. Master Sergeant Doe had praised the training he received from the Special Forces MTT. He wanted a similar team to train the newly organized 1st Infantry Battalion.

LIBMISH used the remaining IMET funds for FY 80 to bring in a Special Forces MTT for 180 days to work with the battalion. The MTT succeeded in not only training the soldiers, but also keeping them off the streets.

More presence was needed to turn the Soviet threat. A key area was the upgrade of military camps, particularly construction of additional enlisted housing. The cost of such a project was well over \$30 million, a far cry from the FY 80 Liberian IMET and FMS budget. In addition, \$80 million was needed to bail out the crumbling economy.

The first step in gaining such financial support was to appraise the Department of State of the situation. Mr. Richard M. Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, conducted a fact finding visit to Liberia.¹⁴ As a result of this visit, he recommended that the United States continue its relationship with Liberia. He cited four objectives to ensure success of the new Doe government:

First, the United States must assist the new government in stabilizing its economy. This should include assisting the Doe government in developing a new budget; adjusting the International Monetary Fund (IMF) deficit; and providing rice under PL-480 funds.

Second, to encourage the PRC to return to civilian rule and release all political prisoners.

Third, if Master Sergeant Doe shows progress, continue the support of military training, outfit the military with new equipment, and initiate construction of enlisted military housing.

Fourth, support long term development of the country. This should include USAID projects.

The State Department presented this information to Congress. The attitude of Congress began to change. On 7 May 1980, Congressman Edward J. Derwinski of Illinois introduced an article by William Raspberry, entitled, "The Painful Truth About Liberia," into the congressional record. The article underlined the graft and corruption that existed prior to the coup. It equated the rule of the Americo-Liberians to the white rulers of Rhodesia.¹⁵

Congress approved additional increases in FY 80 assistance to Liberia. This assistance included \$5.2 million from the economic support fund; \$5.5 million in development assistance; and \$1.07 million in FMS credit and IMET. Progress was also started on the future construction of military housing.¹⁶

With the additional security assistance, LIBMISH requested two additional MTT's--one to train the newly formed Ranger Company, and the other to train the Army staff. Key members of the military were sent to the United States on orientation tours. Included was Sergeant Thomas Quiwonkpa, the new commanding general of the army. New two and one-half ton cargo trucks were ordered through FMS. Finally, at the start of FY 81, low-cost military housing was begun at Barclay Training Center.¹⁷

The United States was sending the message to the Soviets that they were prepared to counter all offers. But would the Doe regime be able to establish itself as a viable government?

MORE PROBLEMS

The PRC appeared to be modifying its position. As a result, President Sekou Toure of Guinea became the first head of state to invite Master Sergeant Doe to visit his country. With Toure's advice, Master Sergeant Doe appeared to modify his position on a number of issues.¹⁸ He opened the borders. He released a number of political prisoners, to include President Tolbert's widow. He announced a goal of returning to civilian rule.

Then, just as everyone began to breathe easier, soldiers burst into the French Embassy in Monrovia and seized the son of the former President, Adolphus Benedict Tolbert. The younger Tolbert was married to the foster daughter of President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast. The French strongly protested this violation of diplomatic immunity. The Ivory Coast threatened to sever all relations with Liberia.¹⁹

The entire diplomatic community was embarrassed. But Master Sergeant Doe was quick to point out the fact that the French never informed the Liberian government that Tolbert's son had asked for political asylum. He assured the diplomats that Tolbert's son would receive a fair and speedy trial. The

French backed off of their protest. There was no trial, only a secret execution several months later.²⁰

For the remainder of the first year following the Coup d'etat, Master Sergeant Doe spent the time improving his army. The strength increased from 5,000 to 8,000 men. Salaries of junior enlisted men were doubled.²¹

The military housing project funded by the United States continued and combined United States/Liberian military exercises were conducted in Liberia. The operations involved over 100 United States Army Special Forces soldiers.²²

On the anniversary of the Coup, the United States Navy sent a destroyer to visit the port of Monrovia and two U.S. Army generals attended the anniversary ceremonies.

Liberia had survived the first year following the coup. Doe considered the United States his closest ally.

MORE TURMOIL

After one year, the Liberian economy showed no improvement. Some tribes complained that Master Sergeant Doe was giving all key positions to members of his own tribe, the Krahn. In May 1981, a coup plot was uncovered and a number of soldiers arrested. Without public trial, all thirteen soldiers were executed.²³

Three months later, a second coup plot surfaced--this time at the highest level of the PRC. Major General Thomas Weh Syen, the Vice Head of State, and four other members of

the PRC were arrested. Master Sergeant Doe announced that the five were plotting his assassination. He also accused the Libyan People's Bureau of orchestrating the plot. A military tribunal found all five guilty of treason and sentenced them to death.²⁴ Master Sergeant Doe ordered the Libyans out of the country. He also reduced the diplomats at the Russian Embassy by half.²⁵

Despite the turmoil, the United States continued to provide economic and security assistance to Liberia. Over a five year period, \$43.5 million would be provided for construction of military housing.²⁶ Liberian military personnel continued to be schooled in the United States and a number of MTT's trained the military in-country. An average of \$80 million per year was provided in economic assistance just to keep the Liberian economy from collapsing.

POLITICAL REVIVAL

By 1983, a draft constitution had been prepared. Like the old constitution, it had a Senate, a House of Representatives, a President, a Vice President, and more than one political party.²⁷ The new constitution was placed before a referendum and approved by the people. Voters were then registered and a number of individuals, to include Gabriel B. Matthews, indicated that they would run for president. Even Brigadier General Thomas Quiwonkpa, the hero of the revolution and the General of the Army, was rumored to be a potential candidate.

Then, in December 1983, Quiwonkpa was accused of plotting yet another coup. Forced into exile, Liberia lost one of its most popular figures.²⁸ Doe claimed that Quiwonkpa had conspired with the Soviets, and, in November 1983, the Soviet ambassador was declared persona non grata and told to leave Liberia.²⁹

Coups and rumors of coups occupied the Liberian government for the next six months. Even Major General Podier, the new Vice Head of State, was arrested.³⁰

Despite these problems, the United States and other donors showed their approval of the progress toward civilian rule by continuing economic support. The United States was now providing more aid per capita to Liberia than to any other country in sub-Saharan Africa. With this strong support, Samuel K. Doe stuck to his schedule for civilian rule by 1985.

The resumption of political activity was far from smooth. Opposition politicians were arrested while Master Sergeant Doe formed his own political party, the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL). Then to be eligible for president, he aged one year to meet the 35 year requirement.³¹

Opposition party members not only objected to his age change, but also argued that he could not run for president while he was still the Head of State. When the Daily Observer published this information, the paper was closed down.³² The United States sent a strong message to Master Sergeant Doe expressing concern over this repression.

Then the sixth coup attempt in five years occurred. Lieutenant Colonel Moses Flanzamaton, the Deputy Commander of the Presidential Guard, attempted to assassinate Doe. Reacting quickly, Flanzamaton and several other individuals were arrested and then executed.³³

The United States Congress began pressuring the State Department to cut economic support to Liberia. Congress was not going to stand by and watch \$93 million (proposed FY 86 aid to Liberia) go to a government running out of control. A congressional subcommittee resolution called on the United States government to monitor the Liberian election process.³⁴

The State Department sent a warning to the Doe government that continual suppression of opposition leaders could result in loss of all funding.

Samuel K. Doe was not listening. His party had the only chance of winning. The two most important parties, The United People's Party (UPP) of Gabriel Matthews, and the Liberian People's Party (LPP) of Amos Sawyer were excluded from participation in the elections. Master Sergeant Doe claimed that both parties had a socialist platform. The Liberian Constitution prohibited the formation of political parties with un-Liberian political ideas--namely alleged socialist leanings.³⁵

Another possible candidate was Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf was the finance minister under the old Tolbert regime and had become a popular member of the opposition. When she produced a strong critique of Master Sergeant Doe's

economic policies, she was arrested and charged with treason. Doe sentenced her to ten years in prison. After strong international pressure, he released her. Fearing for her life, she fled into exile.³⁶

By election day, the opposition had almost been totally eliminated.

PRESIDENT SAMUEL K. DOE

Election day was quiet with a large turnout. Over 519,000 voters flocked to the poles. Unfortunately, the foreign press, mainly Americans covering the election, were unanimous in reporting widespread rigging.³⁷

Master Sergeant Doe won the presidential election with 50.9 percent of the vote. But the talk on the streets in Monrovia was fraud.

Then on 12 November 1985, the country again erupted in violence. General Thomas Quiwonkpa, who had been in exile since 1983, staged a coup to seize power from President Doe. The streets were filled with jubilant people when Quiwonkpa announced on radio station ELWA that he had seized power.³⁸

The joy was short-lived. President Doe, trapped in the Executive Mansion, used the telephone to call his brother-in-law, Colonel Moses Wright, the Commander of the 1st Infantry Battalion. Colonel Wright moved his battalion in to Monrovia, recaptured the radio station, and routed the coup attempt.

The next day, General Quiwonkpa was killed. His dismembered body was put on display.³⁹

With the death of Thomas Quiwonkpa, all opposition to President Samuel K. Doe had been eliminated. The young sergeants who helped him ascend to the position of 20th President of Liberia lay in their graves.

The new President of Liberia appeared to have as many problems as President Tolbert. Opposition parties continued to verbally abuse the government. The economy continued to falter, exasperated by a reduction in United States' aid to \$52 million. No additional military assistance was provided in 1986.⁴⁰ The government attempted to meet its debt obligation, but fell further behind as the world market for both iron ore and rubber tumbled.

By early 1987, Liberia's foreign debt was \$1.4 billion. She owed the International Monetary Fund over \$225 million and was unable to keep up the interest payments.⁴¹

In November 1987, the IMF closed its offices in Monrovia. At the same time, the African Development Bank (ADB) stopped all undispersed loans to Liberia for failure to pay debts. Liberia was in big trouble.⁴²

To add insult to injury, in November 1986 the U.S. Lawyers Committee for Human Rights issued a searing 180 page indictment of the Doe regime. The report condemned President Doe's repression of the press and eluded to fraud, death squads, and numerous violations of human rights.⁴³

The United States Congress already was questioning the amount of money being expended to support President Doe and ordered the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) to audit all funds to Liberia. The GAO report issued in February 1987 showed gross misuse and diversion of funds by the Liberian government. Over \$16.5 million in the PL-480 program alone was missing.⁴⁴

As a result of this report, Senator Robert Kennedy renounced the Doe government and pushed for total elimination of aid to Liberia. He minced no words in charging President Doe with having "used his position to enrich himself."⁴⁵ As this paper was being written, Liberia was still receiving United States' economic and security assistance; but the debate is still ongoing in the halls of Congress.

Finally, the opposition to President Doe is heating up. Gabriel B. Matthews, of the United People's Party, speaks openly against President Doe and his National Democratic Party of Liberia.⁴⁶ Matthews was the founder of the old Progressive People's Party and contributed to the fall of President Tolbert and the coup d'etat that placed Doe in power.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, in exile in the United States, is strongly backed by many Liberians who believe that some day she will be the first woman president of Liberia.⁴⁷

After seven years in power, President (Master Sergeant, General, Doctor) Samuel K. Doe has not changed Liberia for the better. The Liberian on the street is much worse off than he

was under the Tolbert Administration. Despite the efforts by the United States, the soldier still rules. Perhaps to quote the motto of the People's Redemption Council leader, then Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, "In the cause of the people, the struggle continues."

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CHAPTER VI

THE FUTURE

WHAT NOW?

Where does the United States go from here? Is economic and security assistance a viable tool for Liberia in the future? Is there a military or political reason for continued support of the Doe regime? In the future, will our relationship with Liberia impact on our relations with the rest of sub-Saharan Africa?

These questions are asked every year, not only in the State Department, but also in our Congress. They are asked about every Third World country where we attempt to extend our arm of influence. From total assistance packages of several million dollars to billions of dollars, the question is always what do we expect for the money? Our success rate in supporting foreign governments has not always been good. In the past, we have funded or backed the wrong side or failed to react in time. It is not too late for Liberia, but we must take action now.

THE CIA AND THE KGB

The Soviets were so interested in influencing President Doe that they immediately offered assistance. Unfortunately, they underestimated Doe's reaction to efforts to infiltrate

his government. He closed the Soviet Embassy in 1983, claiming that KGB agents were involved in the coup attempt staged by General Quiwonkpa. However, on 4 November 1987 the new Soviet Ambassador presented his credentials to President Doe.¹

Perhaps the Liberian president is hedging his bets, keeping the door open to each side.

It is also common knowledge that the United States carefully cultivated General Thomas Quiwonkpa. The American Embassy arranged for Quiwonkpa to receive military training in the United States and President Doe could not help but suspect our involvement in his fatal attempt to overthrow the Doe government.

Then, on 30 September 1987, the Washington Post disclosed information that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had infiltrated Doe's security force.² The article stated that Lieutenant Colonel Moses Flanzamaton, the executive officer of Doe's Executive Mansion Guard, became a CIA agent in 1985.

Later that year, he attempted to assassinate Doe and confessed to CIA ties. The paper quoted, "It was white knuckles at Langley for days, where top officials feared that the agency would be accused unfairly in the assassination attempt."

In response to this article, President Doe said, "I will not give in to threats from outside force, neither the Russian KGB or the American CIA."³ He also demanded that the United States explain the alleged CIA activities in his country.⁴

A similar reaction occurred after Senator Kennedy's attack on the Liberian government's mismanagement of United

States' aid. Emmanuel Bowier, the new Liberian Information Minister, warned Kennedy against regarding Liberia as his "personal plantation," as Liberia is not "the 51st state of the United States."⁵

THE BOTTOM LINE

No matter what we think of the Doe regime, it is firmly in power. Liberia can also just as easily turn to the Soviets for assistance as to the United States.

It does not take an intelligence analyst to predict rough times for Liberia. The potential exists for total bankruptcy. President Doe and his Krahn counterparts have driven out the people who could have saved the country.

Following the Quiwonkpa coup attempt, Doe took repressive action against Quiwonkpa's tribe, the Gio. Many of the tribal leaders were driven into the Ivory Coast.⁶ The tribe, one of the largest in Liberia, occupies both sides of the Liberian/Ivory Coast border in a virtually unexplored region. The potential for insurgency operations against the Doe government is likely.

There are currently thousands of Americo-Liberians living in exile in the United States. Not only Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf but also former Vice President Warner live in the United States. They all have fled the country following the 1980 coup d'etat. Each dreams of a time when they will return to Liberia and establish a new government.

Finally, both Matthews and Tipoteh both still espouse the Marxist theory of revolution. They are opposed to the Doe government, and now thousands of dissatisfied tribal Liberians also question the motives of the Doe government. They are just looking for a new leader.

The Congress of the United States will hear all of this as it ponders the future support to Liberia. Liberia is a poor risk. Her leaders have already siphoned millions of dollars into their pockets. They will not change.

CONCLUSION

On 29 January 1988, the Reagan Administration disclosed that it was cutting back sharply on security assistance to some key allies and is ending military assistance to many other allies.

In Africa, five countries will no longer receive grant military aid, and ten have been eliminated from the economic support fund program.⁷

Why then should we even consider future support to Liberia?

First, there are the United States assets in Liberia: Liberia has the largest American Embassy in sub-Saharan Africa; the United States operates the telecommunications system for the African continent from its base in Liberia; Voice of America operates one of its largest transmitter sites in Liberia; the Omega Navigational Station for the Eastern Atlantic operates from the coast of Liberia; the Free Port of Monrovia is one of

the few deep water ports open to the United States Navy; Roberts International Field, Liberia's major airport, provides round-the-clock rapid deployment facilities for the United States Air Force; and a number of United States concessions, to include Firestone Rubber and the Liberian/American Iron Ore Company are well worth maintaining.⁹

Second, and perhaps more important, are the strong traditional ties with the United States, ties that go back more than 140 years. Although we never colonized black Africa, Liberia has always been considered a "bastard child" of the United States.

Throughout its history, American culture has influenced Liberia's way of life. Even under Doe, that has not really changed. Today, a white American can feel safer walking the streets of Monrovia than walking in many of the larger cities in the United States.

Our handling of Liberia will have a profound impact on the perception of the United States in sub-Saharan Africa. Countries like Kenya and Nigeria will question both our motives and sincerity if we do not even come to the aid of our own "colony."

RECOMMENDATION

If we wish to have any influence in sub-Saharan Africa, then we must do everything possible to assist Liberia during the crisis of the Doe government. We have no choice but to support President Doe as long as he is in power.

With time, Samuel K. Doe might be able to pull his country out of debt. Many believed he would not survive one year. Seven years later, he is strongly in command.

The cost to maintain our relations with Liberia is inexpensive. A million dollars a year for military assistance is less than we pay for one attack helicopter. Eighty million dollars in economic aid is about the price of one jumbo jet transport. For this nominal cost, we can keep Soviet expansion out of Liberia and keep our foot firmly in the door of sub-Saharan Africa.

Perhaps Assistant Secretary of State, Chester Crocker, summed it up best following a visit to Liberia when he stated that he saw no alternative to "hanging in there."¹⁰

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